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The collections of St. Andrews University in Scotland: issues in university heritage

Introduction

Several factors contribute to the ambiguity surrounding university heritage. To begin, the difficulty associated with university heritage stems from the late introduction of a 'university heritage' concept. The absence of a 'heritage collections' definition placed the existent material heritage held by universities in a precarious and unclear position, compounding the issue as subsequent acquisitions were made. This *ad hoc* collecting practice is typical of institutions both ancient and modern as university collections are continually forming, frequently reorganized, and often lack thorough documentation and/or formalized stewardship from the outset. Collections of university heritage continually fall victim to shifts in administrative attitude, collecting policy and spatial requirements. Additionally, those objects and collections which make up a university's identity or form their heritage may still play an active role in institutional life, away from display cabinets, out of the university curator's jurisdiction.

Surveys undertaken in the 1990s in the UK proved successful in revealing the breadth and wealth of British university art and teaching collections, but they exposed the lack of information regarding universities' kept heritage¹. Heritage objects and

¹ Following the 1986 Museums Association Conference interest in gathering baseline collections data across the university museum sector in the UK, numerous regional surveys were completed. See K. Arnold-Foster, 1989. *The collections of the University of London. A report and survey of the Museums, Teaching and Research Collections administered by the University of London*. London Museums Service, London; K. Arnold-Foster, 1993. *Held in Trust: Museums and Collections of Universities in Northern England*. HMSO, London; K. Arnold-Foster, 1999. *Beyond the Ark: Museums and Collections of Higher Education Institutions in Southern England*. Southern Museums Agency, Winchester, UK; K. Arnold-Foster & J. Weeks, 1999. *Minerals and Magic Lanterns. The University and College Collections of the South West*. South West Museums Council, Somerset; K. Arnold-Foster & J. Weeks, 1999. *Totems and trifles: museums and collections of higher education institutions in the Midlands*. West Midlands regional

collections which do not satisfy typical display, teaching or research functions are often omitted or buried in survey findings, resulting in the incomplete and inaccurate account of university heritage collections. Unless a universal and consistent approach is taken in the identification and recognition of university heritage, institutes of higher education will remain unaware of their identity and, among other purposes, its potential as a possible marketing tool.

In this paper I will discuss the concept of university heritage, address recent initiatives and propose a new approach to heritage, demonstrated by the recognition of heritage collections at St. Andrews.

The university heritage issue: UNESCO

Since the 1972 general conference, UNESCO has recognized only two universities as globally significant sites of cultural heritage². As the international standard-setter, UNESCO's interpretation and identification of heritage proves vital in the global conception of university heritage.

In 1987, the University of Virginia, partnered with Monticello, was the first university added to the World Heritage List. The coupling of Monticello and the University of Virginia as a World Heritage Site demonstrates UNESCO's admission of sites based on their connection with historical figures. As architect and plantation owner of Monticello, Thomas Jefferson created the „ideal academical village which [can still be seen] in the heart of the University of Virginia"³. Though the University of Virginia is neither the first university established in the United States nor the most noted for its academic contributions to early America, it serves as a part of the heritage of one of America's founding fathers, Thomas Jefferson.

In 1998, the University of Alcalá de Henares, Spain, became the second and last university added to the UNESCO list to date. Like the University of Virginia's ties with Jefferson, Alcalá boasts Miguel de Cervantes as its „great son"⁴. Additionally, UNESCO recognizes Alcalá de Henares – the world's first planned university city – for its influence on urban planning and architecture.

It is interesting to note that historical figures linked to the universities are recognised as a key factor for World Heritage inclusion, yet the inclusion of these universities and exclusion of others – Copernicus at Krakow or Newton at Cambridge – raise questions regarding the international attitude towards university heritage. To the present date, UNESCO's conception of university heritage appears rather limited – limited to historical figures and monuments.

Museums Council, Bromsgrove; K. Arnold-Foster & J. Weeks, 2001. *A review of Museums and collections of Higher Education Institutions in the Eastern Region and the South East Region of the South Eastern Museums Service*. South Eastern Museums Service, Bury St. Edmunds; Northern Ireland Museums Council, 2002. *A survey of the university collections in Northern Ireland*. Belfast and L. Drysdale, 1990. *A World of Learning: University Collections in Scotland*. HMSO, Edinburgh. For an overview of the UK surveys, see N. Merriman, *The current state of higher education museums, galleries and collections in the UK*, „Museologia", 2002, vol. 2, p. 71–80.

² See UNESCO website for a full listing of the World Heritage Sites <<http://whc.unesco.org/>>

³ See UNESCO World Heritage – <<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/442>>

⁴ See UNESCO World Heritage – <<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/876>>

It is important to note that history is not synonymous with heritage. Confusion between 'history' and 'heritage' coupled with the differentiation between tangible and intangible heritage cause difficulty in the definition of the university as heritage. The heritage of universities is representative of the historical figures, their ideas and contributions as well as the cultural atmosphere of the institution. Understanding this, heritage cannot necessarily be classified as a 'site'. How then can 'university heritage' be recognized outside of built or tangible heritage?

Created by the UNESCO Culture Sector in 1995, Forum UNESCO – University and Heritage is an international network for the advancement of knowledge in the field of heritage disciplines, linking over 300 universities⁵. Forum seeks to explore the concept of university heritage through team research projects, workshops, seminars, student groups and publications. UNESCO's international approach certainly raises awareness across the sector, but it is the individual universities and regional projects which provide the most comprehensive information. Additionally, projects like UNESCO World Heritage rely on the political interest and participation of national governments, which submit the applications for World Heritage consideration⁶.

The university heritage issue: council of Europe

Proposed by the then forty-one heads of state and government of the Council of Europe (COE), the campaign 'Europe, a common heritage' was launched in 1999⁷. The campaign incorporated five transnational events, co-financed by the European Commission, of which a joint project completed by two separate committees of COE resulted in the publication *Heritage of European Universities*⁸. The collaboration between the Higher Education and Research Committee and the Cultural Heritage Committee proved both unique and fruitful. For the distinct sectors of higher education and cultural heritage to converge on a single project attests to their inherent relationship. This collaborative effort attributed to both the realization of the 'university heritage' concept as well as its introduction to the greater European audience. What proved more interesting than the timely collaboration were the questions the project raised within Europe and certainly further abroad. The COE project highlighted the conceptual challenges concerning the heritage collections of continental Europe, certainly transferable to the collections of Britain, Australia and the Americas.

Heritage of European Universities revealed that the 'university heritage' concept had remained limited since the 1972 UNESCO conference, but serious interest had developed across the sector. The publication addressed the „general consciousness that

⁵ See Forum UNESCO – University and Heritage website <http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=2221&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html>

⁶ The two-fold political aspect of recognizing UNESCO World Heritage Sites is indeed very important. By including 'Site A' or 'Site B' UNESCO certainly legitimates a given concept of heritage. However, ultimately it's up to the individual countries to submit the application and justify it. Each country can only submit one application per year with the decision made at national level. UNESCO then makes choices based on criteria, which may not be directly related to heritage (e.g. environmentally endangered sites).

⁷ The campaign ran from September 1999 to December 2000, with the publication following in 2002.

⁸ N. Sanz & S. Bergan (eds), *The Heritage of European Universities*, Council of Europe, Strasbourg 2002.

the [university has] a long history [but] there is far less consciousness of the heritage of universities”⁹. Though the COE project enabled European universities to explore their collections and share research, it revealed the difficulties academic institutions (both ancient and modern) share in the recognition of their own heritage¹⁰.

On the 7th of December 2005, the COE Committee of Ministers to member states formally adopted recommendations on the governance and management of university heritage proposed by the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research in September 2004. The resulting document includes guidelines and good practice regarding university heritage management and governance, but more importantly it raises international awareness for the recognition of university heritage.

The university heritage issue: UMAC

As an international sub-committee of ICOM, UMAC has provided the university museum community with an outlet for the purpose of collaboration, research and other functions associated with collections of academic institutions. The University Museum Database which can be accessed and used through the UMAC website began forming in 2001 with information voluntarily supplied by individual institutions as well as data transferred from previous database projects. Roughly 2,000 university museum and collection entries make up the searchable database, with users capable of limiting searches by city, university, full museum type and subject.

By subject, the database covers 60 collections categories ranging from agriculture to zoology. Though a search of ‘heritage’ does not exist, a search limited to collections of ‘university history’ is possible. Of the 89 collections classified in the UMAC database as ‘university history’, nearly 50 are found within European institutions¹¹. Whilst the UMAC database proves a useful tool for the research of university museums and collections, the inability to conduct a focused search for ‘heritage collections’ demonstrates the conceptual challenge of university heritage, which should be addressed at the international level. A search of ‘university history’ produces several interesting returns including several *Karzer* – style historical detention rooms, to special collections throughout Britain and even the subject specific Sedgwick Museum of Earth Sciences in Cambridge.

The voluntary aspect of UMAC’s database is demonstrative of the difficulties surrounding university heritage. As institutions are individually responsible for submitting collections information for inclusion in the UMAC database, the collective results can be misleading and inconclusive, rendering the database unreliable as a research tool. While one institution may regard their historical teaching collections to be part of their

⁹ N. Sanz & S. Bergan, *The cultural heritage of European universities* [in:] N. Sanz & S. Bergan (eds), 2002, *op.cit.*, p. 49.

¹⁰ On 7 December 2005, the COE has adopted the ‘Recommendation on the Governance and Management of University Heritage’ (Rec.(2005)13). For full text of the Recommendation, see <http://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=946661&BackColorInternet=9999CC&BackColorIntranet=FFBB55&BackColorLogged=FFAC75>. See S. Bergan, *in press*, *Council of Europe adopts Recommendation on university heritage*, „Museologia”, vol. 4, no. 1.

¹¹ 11 of these collections are located in the UK, four in Edinburgh alone.

institutional identity, another may consider them no more than departmental or subject-specific. Additionally, the voluntary aspect of the database only elicits response from those institutions interested in participation, leading to incomplete or underrepresentation of those universities who are either not interested in contributing or unable to make a valued response. The UMAC database has problems in relation to conceptual and terminological consistency, identical to UNESCO and COE. These problems could be remedied through more research and information sharing. It is important for university museums to participate in collaborative projects and contribute to networks and databases in order to present a more complete and accurate picture of the current state of universities and their heritage.

University heritage marketing

Adopting a more inclusive definition of heritage may prove the necessary step forward. Each institution is individual and their collections reflect this. Notwithstanding, since UNESCO's recognition of the University of Virginia in 1987, a clear standard of university heritage has yet to be reached. Placing standardized constraints and qualifications on such a diverse sector has stunted the realization of university heritage. I argue that adopting a more inclusive approach, focused on individual institutional identity is a way forward. Furthermore, giving the newly recognized heritage a purpose such as marketing could provide these collections with a second life¹².

University collections range from subject-specific and historic teaching collections to collections of decorative and commemorative artworks¹³. As heritage objects may only serve a ceremonial, commemorative or historical purpose within the university, it is difficult for institutions to justify the channeling of resources away from teaching and research in favor of supporting their collections of heritage. During the 1980s, government cutbacks in public spending in the UK led to difficulties for universities, with university collections enduring staff and funding shortages and attempts to rationalize through the disposal and sale of collections. The 1986 Museums Association Conference served as a platform for university museum advocacy, with the then director of the Manchester Museum, Alan Warhurst, addressing the crises in university museums. Warhurst described the struggle of the university museum as a „crisis in identity and purpose, a crisis of recognition; compounded by a crisis of resources”¹⁴. I argue that a strong institutional identity can elicit recognition from university courts and funding bodies, encouraging them to provide the resources for university collections to fulfill their potential by supporting the institution as a marketing tool.

¹² In 2004, the University Museums Group (UMG), an interest group for university museums in the UK, launched the advocacy document ‘University Museums in the United Kingdom: a national resource for the 21st century’. The report outlined the current status, achievements and aims of the university museum sector, advocating (amongst other things) for better recognition of the cultural and social value of university museums and collections, citing the ‘contribution that a well-resourced and well-respected museum makes to the standing and profile of the university’.

¹³ J. Hamilton, *The role of the university curator in the 1990s*, „Museum Management and Curatorship”, 1995, vol. 14, no. 1, p. 73–79.

¹⁴ A. Warhurst, *Triple crisis in university museums*, „Museums Journal”, 1986, vol. 86, no. 3, p. 137–140, quote from p. 137.

University heritage may prove to be an advantage in the European market, where universities both ancient and modern compete for students and staff. Higher education has become an increasingly market-driven sector and universities cannot rely entirely on standard methods of student and staff recruitment. By emphasizing institutional traditions and age in connection with the cultural value of founding collections, universities are equipped to offer prospective students and staff with a unique and enriched university experience. From the university's medieval foundation, its „image and character [were] expressed by... costumes, insignia, and festivities”¹⁵ and by adopting a more contemporary outlook regarding marketing and institutional promotion, ancient universities (in particular) can utilize their heritage collections to differentiate themselves in the current market. Incorporating the range of collections found within academic institutions, from historic teaching and research collections to commemorative objects, will enable universities to form a more complete realization of their identity and a strong platform for marketing a ‘corporate identity’ or ‘university brand’ to a broader audience¹⁶.

The University of St. Andrews

The Museum Collections Unit of St. Andrews University – a common structure integrating the museums and collections from the University – is set to begin a new phase in the use and display of its collections, with a particular focus on the university's heritage. These include plans for the development of a university museum unlike any project completed in Britain to date, yet familiar to university collections on the continent. As Scotland's most ancient university approaches its sexcentenary in 2013, St. Andrews demonstrates both an understanding and appreciation for its institutional heritage as well as its role in the university's future¹⁷.

Placed in the wider context of the UK and continental Europe, the heritage collections of St. Andrews prove an interesting comparative study, which reveal both the ambiguity and incongruities found throughout the university museum and heritage sector. The categorical considerations of St. Andrews' collections are exclusive among the universities of Britain. As the only university in the UK to specifically recognize, classify and display ‘heritage’ collections to the public, St. Andrews demonstrates an awareness and appreciation for its institutional identity.

¹⁵ A. Gieysztor, *Management and resources* [in:] H. de Ridder-Symoens (ed.), *A History of the University in Europe*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, vol. 1, p. 108–143. Quote from p. 139.

¹⁶ N. Bulotaitė, *University heritage. An institutional tool for branding and marketing*, „Higher Education in Europe”, 2003, vol. 28, no. 4, p. 449–454.

¹⁷ A program for marking the anniversary has not yet been drawn up, but, in addition to the new museum, a research project is already underway, including the recruitment of PhD students investigating aspects of the University's history.

The Gateway Project

During the September 2000 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) seminar in Paris, Professor Ian Carradice delivered a paper entitled 'Funding and public access through partnership in business'¹⁸. Only two months before Professor Carradice presented his paper in Paris, the University of St. Andrews, in co-operation with a private company, was set to open a new university museum within The Gateway, a GBP 8.5m development. The university had agreed to lease property located at the entrance of the historical town directly across from the famous Old Course, to a commercial company interested in developing a leisure club complex for golfers and tourists. The company agreed to a set of conditions made by the university, with the addition of a university museum and information centre to the company's original plan for The Gateway complex. Furthermore, the company agreed to cover maintenance and staffing costs for the building, including security costs associated with the museum.

The building was completed in May 2000, with displays of the university's impressive collection of historical and heritage objects set for installation. If the commercial company had not gone into bankruptcy, the University of St. Andrews would have opened the first university museum in Britain dedicated to telling the story of its parent institution through its historic teaching and heritage collections. Though the secured funding and facilities through partnership with a private company failed with the collapse of the commercial partner, the university museum concept has survived.

The spirit of Professor Carradice's OECD paper was not lost, and the five-year gap has seen development at The Gateway despite contractual and legal constraints. On September 28th, 2005 the university display galleries will officially open in the newly conceived Gateway building, now owned by the university and operating as a home for the University's Schools of Management and Business Education in addition to providing public display areas and a tourist information centre.

The Gateway galleries feature an area exhibiting a 'sample' of the University's history and treasures, and a temporary exhibition gallery. In addition to this, the University's Museum Collections Unit also plans to provide at a separate site the remaining element originally conceived for the 2000 Gateway project. This is a separate museum illustrating the history and heritage of the University of St. Andrews. If successful, the Museum of the University of St. Andrews (MUSA) should open to the public in 2007, housing innovative galleries illustrating the university's history with space for the teaching of the museum studies course, within an historic building.

I believe the MUSA development is representative of St. Andrews forward-thinking and fluid approach to the use and display of its historical and heritage collections. Utilizing an historical building within the university, yet employing a contemporary attitude towards displaying institutional identity may prove to be the most innovative project of a British university to date.

¹⁸ I. Carradice, *Funding and public access through partnership with business* [in:] M. Kelly (ed.), „Managing University Museums”, 2001, p. 133–139. OECD, Paris.

Conclusion

The Gateway was originally conceived as a 'shop front window' to the university, utilizing heritage collections to promote the identity of St. Andrews and tell its story since the Middle Ages. Certainly St. Andrews' set of circumstances is unique; a medieval university enjoying the tourism and geographical advantages as the seaside home of golf, but each university has different attributes worth considering.

University heritage marketing may prove to be a step forward in the realization of institutional identity and promotion at St. Andrews, and a similar development may be appropriate for other, especially 'ancient' universities, but it may not prove the correct route for all. As 'university heritage' proves difficult to define, using a more inclusive definition will enable institutions to incorporate a broader range of collections to make a realization of their identity. Whether these collections are kept by an ancient or modern university will determine how they fit into their institution's heritage. Considering this, it also affects how the institution makes use of their heritage. Universities can use these newly defined heritage collections for external marketing and promotion or to encourage recognition and raise awareness of their holdings within their own institution.

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STRESZCZENIE

Zbiory Uniwersytetu St. Andrews w Szkocji: zagadnienia dziedzictwa uniwersyteckiego

Kolekcja najstarszego uniwersytetu w Szkocji, St. Andrews, gromadzi zabytki o charakterze dydaktycznym i estetycznym posiadające znaczenie nie tylko dla tej uczelni, ale również wartościowe w skali międzynarodowej. Jako jedyny uniwersytet w Zjednoczonym Królestwie, St. Andrews gromadzi zbiory wykazując zrozumienie i szacunek dla swej wielo-

wiekowej historii. Z myślą o roli, jaką kolekcja odgrywać będzie w przyszłości w ramach tej uczelni, powstał sektor charakteryzujący się nowym podejściem do „dziedzictwa uniwersyteckiego”. Ponieważ Dział do spraw Zbiorów Muzealnych Uniwersytetu St. Andrews wchodzi w nową fazę wykorzystania i ekspozycji kolekcji, planując utworzenie nowego muzeum, analizuję w niniejszym artykule następujące zagadnienia: konceptualny rozwój „dziedzictwa uniwersyteckiego” oraz inne sposoby wykorzystania zbiorów, oprócz ich przechowywania i dokumentowania historii uczelni wyższej. Artykuł omawia konceptualne i terminologiczne trudności związane z „dziedzictwem uniwersyteckim” oraz wprowadza nowe metody jego popularyzacji.



II. I. The Gateway Galleries (courtesy University of St. Andrews, Museum Collections Unit)



II. II. Museum of the University of St. Andrews (MUSA), artist's impression (courtesy University of St. Andrews, Museum Collections Unit)